**China effect stuns education researchers**

**88.3% of young Chinese immigrants go to university, study finds**

By Joanne Laucius, The Ottawa Citizen October 4, 2009

Call it the China effect. An astonishing 88.3 per cent of young Chinese immigrants in Canada go to university -- more than double the figure for young Canadians as a whole, according to a new study.

When community college was added to the mix, 98.3 per cent of young Chinese immigrants sought post-secondary education by the time they were 21 years old.

Ross Finnie, an economist at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, expected the figure to be high, but this was astounding.

"These numbers are so high, they don't even seem possible," said Finnie, who crunched the numbers from Canada's sweeping Youth in Transition Survey with co-author Richard Mueller at the University of Lethbridge.

Arthur Sweetman, an economist at Queen's University who has done extensive research on immigrant education and labour force participation, calls them "Generation 1.5" -- immigrants who came to Canada as children and spent at least some years in the Canadian school system.

Generation 1.5 has been thriving in Canada, despite figures that have suggested for the past 20 years that their parents have suffered in the quest for prosperity, says Sweetman.

"Many immigrants come here for the kids. The kids understand that and they work for it."

The numbers suggest not just a brain gain for Canada, but the foundation of an entrepreneurial class with schooling in Canada and one foot in another culture.

Winnie Ye came to Canada from China at 14 with only a tenuous grasp of English. By the time she graduated from Glebe Collegiate in 1996, she was the Ottawa public school board's top graduate.

Ye's parents, both university professors in China, urged her to study medicine, but she decided on electrical engineering at Carleton University.

After a string of scholarships, a PhD and a three-year post-doctoral sojourn at MIT and Harvard, Ye was named the Canada Research Chair in Nano-scale IC Design for Reliable Opto-Electronics and Sensors at Carleton last week.

It's a mouthful -- and a prestigious appointment for so young a scientist. Ye designs devices that source, detect and control light and develops biosensor systems, research that will help create new vaccines and drugs.

Now 32, Ye could have remained in the U.S., but opted to return to Canada.

"I have lived in Canada for half my life. Canada is my home," she says. "The government has invested a lot in me."

Immigrant hustle is nothing new. But the China effect continues into the first generation born in Canada, with 81.3 per cent going to university and 13.6 per cent going to college, Finnie and Mueller found.

The China effect was the strongest in the study, but it wasn't the only one. First and second-generation immigrants from many parts of the world were more likely to seek post-secondary education than those born in Canada. (In the study, second-generation immigrant refers to a child born in Canada of immigrant parents.)

A little less than 38 per cent of non-immigrant youth went to university compared to 57 per cent of all first-generation immigrants and 54.3 per cent of second-generation immigrants, says Finnie, who mined the data from Canada's Youth in Transition survey, which asked in-depth questions of 26,000 Canadian young people who were 15 in 1999.

The survey, which is following that same group as they grow up, has some of the richest data in the world, ranging from youth study habits to perceptions of their own self-esteem and the social support they get from family and friends.

The immigrant effect was obvious in youth from a number of regions. More than 90 per cent of immigrants from Asian countries other than China (including India and the Middle East) as well as those from African nations went to university or college.

The study also looked at immigrants from English-speaking nations, as well as western and northern Europe.

About 70 per cent of them attend university or college, close to the rate for non-immigrants. The only group less likely to go than non-immigrants were those born anywhere else in the Americas, aside from the United States.

Finnie and Mueller ran the numbers in a different way, creating a mathematical model that cancelled out some factors that might explain the difference, including parents with higher education, high school marks and income levels. Even after cancelling those out, immigrants were still going to university in disproportionately high numbers.

Meanwhile, the immigrant effect gets watered down slightly after the first generation. How much it is diluted varies widely depending on the group, says Finnie.

Another interesting pattern was noted: those with a Canadian mother and an immigrant father were 19 percentage points more likely to go to university than non-immigrant youth. But if the youth had an immigrant mother and a non-immigrant father, the difference was 13 percentage points.

The immigrant thirst for education is often explained by suggesting that high aspirations are nurtured by parents who have high levels of education, says Sweetman. But it's not just the children of people with PhDs.

"There's a bunch of kids from Vietnam and Korea with parents who don't have an education," he says. "They have a culture of fostering education."

Ye says she was certainly not a study machine as a high school student. She recalls staying up to watch TV the night before a math exam and listed shopping with friends as a favourite pastime, along with the less orthodox hobby of repairing electronic gizmos.

Opportunities presented themselves and she took them. An unpaid high school co-op placement led to a summer job mapping computer chips. She won numerous scholarships.

"In grad school, you have to be persistent," she says. "I put a lot of pressure on myself."

There were cultural pressures as well. Both of Ye's sisters earned degrees in computer science.

Chinese parents want their children to have stable well-paying jobs, says Ye.

They believe in self-sufficiency and in reaping the rewards for investing effort and money in education. Children believe they have a duty to both support elderly parents and to meet their own potential, she says.

"It's the Asian culture."

There are Generation 1.5 implications for Canadian society as a whole, says Finnie.

The pattern in Canada appears to be different from that in Europe, where there are signs of unrest and alienation suggesting immigrants and their children have not integrated into their new societies.

The difference might have something to do with Canada's immigration "points" system, which favours people who are young, have more education, better language skills and relatives already living in Canada.

"We're interested in nation-building," says Sweetman. "They're interested in people doing menial labour."

Sweetman, a researcher at the Queen's School of Policy Studies, was involved in research that looked at differences in education levels among U.S. and Canadian immigrants and how that trickled down through three generations.

The results suggested that differences in immigration policy -- Canada has a greater emphasis on skilled workers -- accounted for lower education levels among U.S. immigrants compared to Canadian immigrants. The gap is expected to widen because of the "intergenerational transmission of education."

Finnie's study really crystallizes the success of Generation 1.5, says Sweetman.

"It's a two-sided message. The kids do well in the education system. And the education system does well by the kids."

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